# PALESTINE REFUGEES today

UNRWA

No. 135
January 1994

1994 International Year of the Family

UNRWA INITIATIVES
Supporting the peace

PHOTO FEATURE
The Palestinian family

NGO NEWS
Smiles in Gaza

A REFUGEE'S STORY
Journey to Baqa'a

HEALTH CARE
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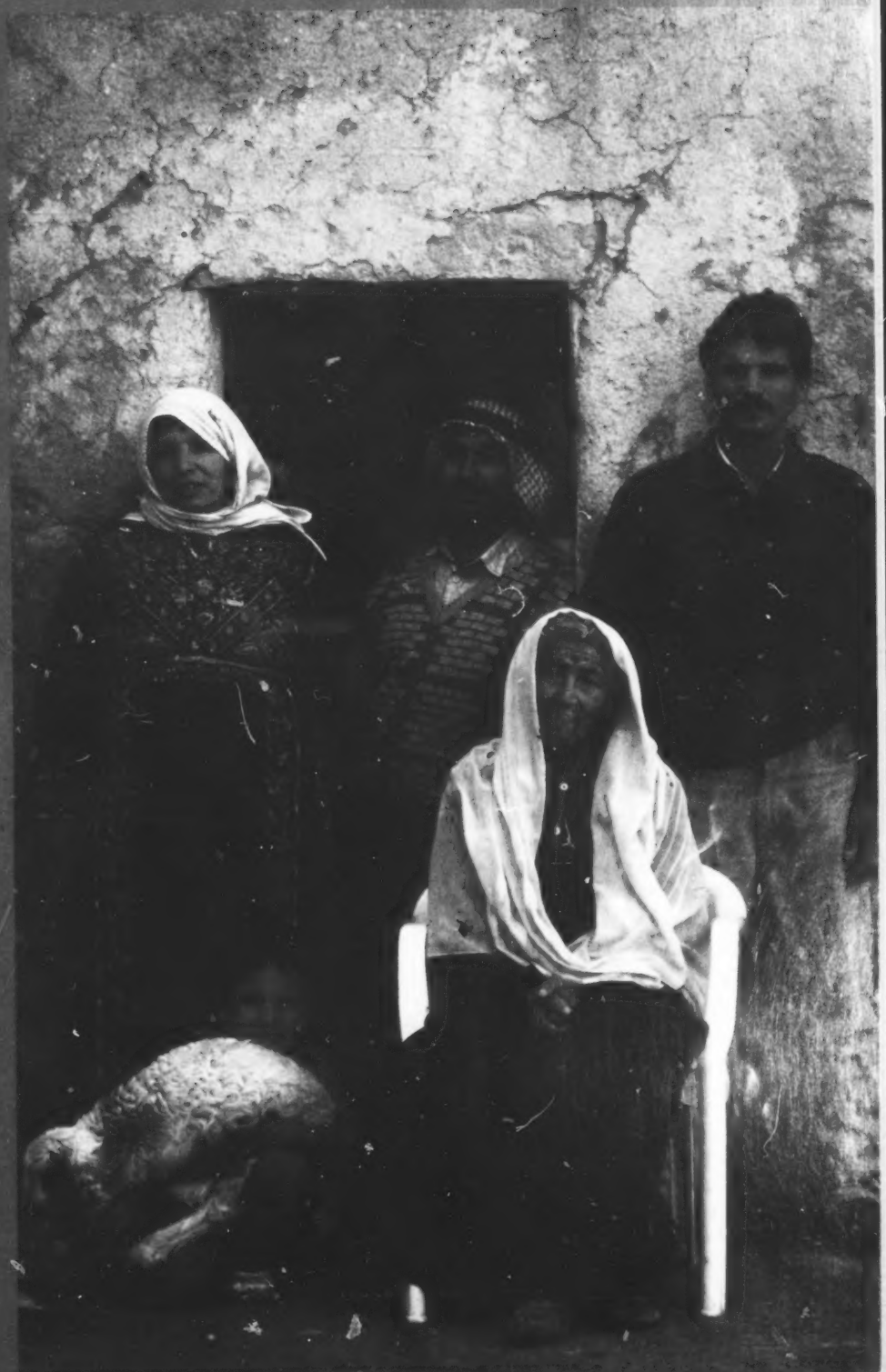

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Commissioner-General Ilter Türkmen touring an Agency facility in Gaza.

# UNRWA: supporting the peace

*The Declaration of Principles signed by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel on 13 September 1993 has potentially opened a new era for Palestinians. Palestine Refugees Today interviewed UNRWA Commissioner-General Ilter Türkmen about UNRWA's response to the self-rule agreement.*

***How has UNRWA adapted to the new political environment created by the September agreement between the PLO and Israel?***

We immediately set up an internal task force to analyse our role in the new circumstances and to consider how we could support the peace process. Just a month after the ceremony in Washington D.C. we launched our Peace Implementation Programme (PIP), a major effort to improve services and infrastructure for Palestine refugees. We have already identified over US $100 million in projects in the Gaza Strip and West Bank alone.

The key to our ability to respond rapidly was the Agency's long and well-established presence on the ground. We have over 8,000 experienced staff in Gaza and the West Bank, almost all of whom are Palestinians, who moved quickly to identify projects. Senior staff members in education, health and social services have strong links with their counterparts in the community. We also have the infrastructure - buildings, transportation and administrative procedures - already in place.

We set up the Peace Implementation Programme - PIP for short - in close consultation with the Palestine Liberation Organization and also in line with the recommendations of a United Nations report called 'Supporting the Transition' produced by a UN Task Force which included UNRWA. UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali formed the Task Force to co-ordinate United Nations efforts and to work out priorities for economic and social development in Gaza and the West Bank.

***What does UNRWA aim to do under PIP?***

We have three main aims. First, to improve the basic physical and social services infrastructure, especially in those sectors where the Palestinians are expected to assume authority in the future. Second, to

create urgently needed jobs. And third, to support the peace process by improving the social and economic living conditions of Palestinians.

Let me give you a few examples to demonstrate the range of projects we are undertaking. In education, we have been asked by the PLO to help upgrade both UNRWA and non-UNRWA schools and to lend our teacher-training expertise. In health, UNRWA has just started the construction of a 232-bed hospital in the Gaza Strip, the first new hospital built there since 1967. We are also upgrading health centres and taking action to alleviate the appalling environmental health conditions in the Gaza Strip. We are repairing or reconstructing over 10,000 shelters in the West Bank and Gaza as well as providing credit, training and loans to alleviate poverty and support small businesses to create jobs.

***How is PIP being financed?***

So far, we have received firm pledges totalling about $38 million from donor governments. We are pleased with these results, but we are concerned that we may find ourselves short of cash to finance our regular budget. If regular contributions continue at the present level, we could face a cash shortfall of over $21 million in 1994. This would hit basic services not only in the West Bank and Gaza Strip but also in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic

***Are Jordan, Lebanon and Syria also included in PIP?***

The attention of the international community is focused mainly on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But we feel that it is equally important that donors demonstrate to the 1.8 million Palestine refugees living in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria that they are a part of the peace process and that their needs for better education, health care and housing should also be met. We have already identified over $73 million in projects to improve facilities and services for refugees in these countries.

# In Brief... UNRWA's Peace Implementation Programme

*"An obvious candidate for the implementation of emergency projects in the transition period is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency."* Economist Intelligence Unit *country report on the Occupied Territories, 4th quarter 1993*

New construction, upgrading of facilities and improvement of services - these are the main aims of UNRWA's Peace Implementation Programme (PIP) which has identified nearly $175 million in projects so far, $100 million of which will be spent in the West Bank and Gaza Strip within two years. Palestinians will be able to see and benefit from physical improvements in their surroundings. The programme will also have a significant impact on the local economies where UNRWA operates; creating business opportunities, a demand for locally produced goods and most importantly, thousands of

**Poor drainage leaves Beach camp overflowing on a wet winter day in Gaza.**

desperately-needed jobs. Some examples of PIP projects are listed below.

## CONSTRUCTION AND UPGRADING

**In the Gaza Strip:**

Construct and equip 14 Agency schools (estimated cost: US $10.8 million) *funded;*

- two new health centres in Beit Hanoun and Khan Younis ($1.2 million);
- five women's programme centres ($840,000).

Construct a college of nursing ($2.3 million).

Construct expand and repair 36 non-UNRWA health clinics ($4.6 million).

Upgrade five UNRWA schools and 30 other schools ($3.5 million) *partially funded.*

**In the West Bank:**

Construct and equip three new schools ($2.2 million).

Construct eight classrooms to avoid triple shifting, four science laboratories, multi-purpose rooms and libraries ($1.4 million);

- a diesel workshop and two workshops at Kalandia Vocational Training Centre and a multi-purpose hall with two workshops at Ramallah Men's Training Centre ($1.2 million).

Upgrade 10 schools and sports facilities ($2.3 million).

**In Jordan:**

Construct five schools ($3.6 million).

## ENVIRONMENT

**In the Gaza Strip:**

Establish a storm water system in Jabalia camp ($1.25 million) and solid waste disposal systems in four other camps ($1.75 million).

Upgrade municipal refuse collection and disposal ($2.6 million) of water systems, sewerage and drainage *funded.*

**In the West Bank:**

Improve refuse collection and pay for a study of sewerage and drainage systems in five camps ($750,000) *partially funded.*

**In Lebanon:**

Improve environmental health conditions in 10 refugee camps ($11.5 million) *partially funded.*

**In the Syrian Arab Republic:**

Build a new sewerage scheme for Khan Eshieh and Khan Danoun camps ($5 million).

## HOUSING

Under PIP, a $12 million project in the **West Bank** aims to rebuild or repair some 1,800 homes on a contractual or self-help basis (*funded*). In **Gaza** a $4 million project would rehabilitate refugee shelters and a $1.5 million project would put new roofs on nearly 2,100 refugee homes. In **Lebanon**, $14 million would cover the cost of rehousing about 4,800 out of some 6,000 displaced Palestinian families. In Syria, several million dollars will pay for the reconstruction of Neirab barracks.

## INCOME GENERATION

PIP will expand on UNRWA's existing income generation programme which aims to provide $20 million in seed capital in revolving loans over five years creating an estimated 5,000 jobs. By November 1993, more than 200 loans worth about $3.2 million had been advanced. Specific projects under PIP in the **Gaza Strip** include the creation of about 300 jobs by providing loans to small businesses ($2.2 million) and 50 loans will target improving the viability of medium-sized businesses ($6 million). In the **West Bank**, just over $1 million would provide 50 loans to small businesses.

## DONOR SUPPORT FOR PIP

| Donor | Types of project |
|---|---|
| Australia | Construction of health centre and dental clinic, income-generation, poverty alleviation in Gaza and West Bank |
| Belgium | Construction of four schools in Gaza |
| Canada | Youth activities programme in Gaza and West Bank |
| Denmark | Re-housing in Lebanon; environmental health, funding of experts in Gaza |
| European Union | Shelter rehabilitation, school construction and expansion in Gaza and West Bank |
| Finland | Projects to be determined |
| Germany | Environmental health study, renovation and construction of health centre in the West Bank; shelter rehabilitation in Lebanon; construction and upgrading schools in Syria |
| Japan | Shelter rehabilitation and environmental health in Gaza and West Bank |
| Luxembourg | Projects to be determined |
| Netherlands | Health centre renovation in Gaza |
| Norway | Irrigation programme in Gaza and West Bank |
| Sweden | School construction in the West Bank |
| Switzerland | Upgrading schools and health centres in Gaza |
| USA | Shelter rehabilitation and upgrading schools in Gaza; rehousing in Lebanon |

**Poor housing in need of repair - Burj El - Barajneh, Lebanon.**

# "I think this agreement is worth it"

*'On September 13, 1993, a century of war in Palestine came to an end. To be precise, the day held out a promise of the end or, even more precisely, the beginning of the end. History, playing its customary cruel tricks, may yet collapse the events of the day into the category of delusion. Still, the signs suggested that peace in the Middle East was finally at hand.' From the epilogue of* ***Sandcastles: The Arabs in Search of the Modern World*** *by Milton Viorst.*

Flying the flag in Gaza.

*US writer Milton Viorst travelled to the Middle East in November 1993 to gather final impressions before his book was published.*

*Viorst begins his epilogue by describing the signing of the PLO-Israel accord and the historic handshake between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat in Washington D.C. Then he turns his attention to the changes brought about by the pact.*

'Gaza, when I arrived a few weeks after the handshake on the White House lawn, was not the place I had known. It was not just the flags. The Israeli military administration, in anticipation of orders to withdraw, had dropped enforcement of the ban on the display of Palestinian flags, and from the rooftops of nearly every house flew the green, red, white and black banner that symbolized Palestinian nationalism and resistance to the occupation. Their presence was a statement of hope that the occupation was about to end. But it took me a few days of driving through the city and the refugee camps to realize that the change in the atmosphere went deeper. The soldiers were still in their observation posts and barracks, surrounded by barbed wire. But the remorselessly patrolling jeeps, carrying scowling young men in helmets and khaki nervously fingering the triggers of automatic weapons, were gone, and tension in the streets was palpably relieved.

'New concerns, however, were replacing the old ones. In the week or so prior to my arrival, three veteran leaders of the Fatah movement, had been assassinated. All three had strongly supported the peace agreement. Gazans could not help worrying whether the military administration was going to be superseded by a Palestinian rule that presided over chaos."

## UNRWA AT WORK

*While in Gaza, Viorst met UNRWA Commissioner-General Ilter Türkmen, who was there for the groundbreaking of the new Agency hospital near Khan Younis. Viorst quotes Mr. Türkmen as saying:* ' "The Agency runs the camps, the schools, the relief programs and the clinics that serve the refugees, and it has the largest administrative staff in the Gaza Strip, nearly all Palestinian." '

*Viorst also visited the West Bank.* 'The West Bank by its very nature is more relaxed than Gaza, but during the *intifadah*, it was permanently on edge. I was delighted to find that life was almost as I remembered it in the pre-*intifadah* years. Jerusalem's

Old City teemed with tourists, and Jewish and Arab merchants once again rubbed shoulders as they competed for patronage. The restaurants of East Jerusalem had reopened, and even Israelis were beginning to drift back to sample the salads and kebabs. The universities as well as the schools were in full operation, and students I met seemed intent on catching up with the studies they had missed during the years that the army kept the doors of their institutions closed.

### SIGNS OF CHANGE

'I drifted from Jerusalem down to Jericho one day to look for signs of the change. Jericho has the character of a town-that-time-forgot. From the overlooking hills, its green fields and palm trees are visually exciting.

'More or less at random, I picked out a merchant on the town square. Standing amid boxes of eggplants and tomatoes, dressed in an apron and a *jalabiya*, he allowed that the people of Jericho were proud that theirs would be the first town liberated on the West Bank, and he pointed through the trees with some disdain at the Israeli police post, surrounded by barbed wire, on the other side of the square. "Our police headquarters will be there," he said.'

Abu Wajdi with his family in Jalazone camp, West Bank.

*Viorst interviewed Hasan Abu Libdeh, the chairman of the technical committees formed to back up the Palestinian delegation to the peace negotiations, who told him,* ' "The transfer of authority will not be easy. It doesn't mean simply replacing an Israeli with a Palestinian in every office. It also means changing policies and objectives. In every field, we will have to review hundreds of military orders, many of which have long been concealed from us. We have to look at the files that the army has maintained, and we have to ask many, many questions of the Israelis." '

### A FAMILY PATRIARCH

*Viorst also reports from the West Bank.* 'Abu Wajdi is the patriarch of the family I visited several years ago in the Jalazone refugee camp north of Ramallah, when four of his nine sons were in prison for *intifadah* activities, and one was in hiding. All were now back home, he said, but one walks with a limp, another recently had back surgery and a third has chronic stomach problems, all from wounds received in encounters with Israeli soldiers or settlers.

Abu Wajdi's sons admitted that it would be hard to overcome the anger generated by years of struggle with the settlers and the army.

' "We've had too many broken bones," said Mourad, who was twenty-three. "We've had too many demolished houses to forget the occupation. There's too much bitterness. But we don't want any more killing, any more war. The good thing is that now we're getting our independent state." Then he added wryly, "If we get it." Abu Wajdi himself summed up his family's feelings. "Even though I can never forget my village, I think this agreement is worth it." '

**Sandcastles: The Arabs in Search of the Modern World by Milton Viorst will be published by Knopf in 1994. Extracts reprinted by permission of the author.**

The road to Jericho

# Focus on family health

A refugee woman receives dental care at an UNRWA clinic.

*The United Nations has designated 1994 as the International Year of the Family. Despite a chronic lack of financial resources, the Agency has made major strides in improving the health status of thousands of refugee families.*

The room was bursting with life: packed wall to wall with jostling mothers, babies and toddlers all striving to reach the doctors via one door in this UNRWA clinic for Palestine refugees in Rafah in the Gaza Strip.

Some of the babies were ill; others just needed weighing, measuring and checking. Trapped in the airless crush, the woman from Europe, on an official tour of UNRWA premises, wanted to get out - fast. There was no room and no respite here from the oppressive heat of this town on the Egyptian border.

Suddenly she saw two familiar faces - a mother and her baby son, both looking at her with laughing smiles and bright, dark eyes. The visitor had first met them at the clinic entrance, yet they greeted her now like a friend.

Panic dispelled, she laughed with them and relaxed into the general surge forward to the next room. There, two good-humoured doctors, facing the fray from the other side of a simple table, were attending to each patient in turn with all the calmness and efficiency of true professionals.

## CO-ORDINATING EFFORTS

Today, it is precisely this type of primary health service which the World Bank is urging the international community to support both in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank during the transition to Palestinian self-rule. The World Bank team which visited Gaza and the

### UNRWA HEALTH SERVICES AT A GLANCE:

**UNRWA provides primary health care services to the registered refugee population including medical care services (both preventive and curative), environmental health services in camps, and nutrition and supplementary feeding to vulnerable population groups. These services are complemented by secondary services including hospitalization and other referral services.**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Health personnel** | **249 doctors** |
| | **763 nurses** |
| | **52 dentists** |
| | **279 paramedicals** |
| | **1,208 environmental health** |
| | **632 other categories** |
| **Patient Visits** | **25 avg. patients per dentist per day** |
| | **91 avg. patients per doctor per day** |
| **Immunization** | **97% of refugee population immunized against polio** |
| | **97% immunized against diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus** |
| **Out-patient facilities** | **119 health centres and mother-and-child clinics** |
| | **68 dental clinics** |
| | **42 specialist clinics** |
| | **105 diabetes clinics** |
| | **105 hypertension clinics** |
| | **13 physiotherapy units** |

West Bank in late 1993 recommended that organizations running health services in the two areas - UNRWA, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Civil Administration - should co-ordinate efforts so that the Palestinians can eventually assume responsibility for a fully integrated and affordable health care system. With this in mind, UNRWA health officials have started consultations with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and the Palestinian Health Council.

Palestinians are already carrying out nearly all the day-to-day health care in UNRWA's 119 clinics - including 17 in Gaza and 34 in the West Bank. As well as easing the process of change, the Agency will play a crucial role in meeting the major portion of Palestinian health needs. UNRWA provides more than 40 per cent of all preventive care to children and pregnant women in the Palestinian population - both refugees and non-refugees - in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The services are cost-effective - about US$9 per person per year in Gaza and the West Bank.

## A STORY OF SUCCESS

UNRWA is justifiably proud of its achievements in improving health care. Through its mass immunization programmes and emphasis on mother-and-child care, the Agency has helped to bring infectious diseases under control and to cut the infant mortality rate among Palestine refugees to well below the target set by the World Health Organization (WHO) - 50 deaths per thousand live births for developing countries by the year 2000. The infant and child mortality rates are even lower in the refugee camps where UNRWA provides most of its health services.

The Agency has systemized health checks on children, introducing growth charts. Malnutrition among children has been eliminated. UNRWA also pioneered the use of oral rehydration salts for treatment of diarrhoea - previously a major killer of the young.

Today, the health status of Palestine refugees resembles that of many populations whose countries are in transition from a developing to a developed state. UNRWA has responded to changing needs by giving more attention to other health problems, opening specialist clinics, dental clinics, physiotherapy units and special programmes for control of non-communicable diseases such as anaemia.

The most recent report of UNRWA's Director of Health notes other successes, including improvements in caring for patients with diabetes, new arrangements for treating refugees suffering from hypertension, an expanded maternal health programme in the Gaza Strip and West Bank and progress in extending the mental health programme introduced in 1991. During the transition, UNRWA can play a major role in the transfer of appropriate technology and harmonization of the health care system at the primary level - the most cost-effective component of any public health programme.

### IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN GAZA

**UNRWA has taken the lead in promoting sustainable development in water and sanitation in the Gaza Strip by commissioning a series of feasibility studies to assess needs and identify technical options and projects.**

**A major report, based on a study commissioned by UNRWA in 1993, calls for specific action to deal with the dangers of environmental degradation in Gaza. The study analyses the environment in the entire Gaza Strip, including camps and adjacent municipalities, identifies actions to develop the environmental health sector, including management of water supply, sewerage, drainage and solid waste and recommends immediate studies and projects which would improve the situation.**

**Waiting to see the doctor. An UNRWA clinic in Gaza town.**

# The Palestinian family

*Resourceful and determined, Palestine refugee families have struggled over the years to keep up traditions, carve out lives for themselves and provide a better future for their children against tremendous odds. A refugee camp is the only home hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugee families have ever known.*

*These photos offer a few examples of thousands of powerful, untold stories. UNRWA photographers captured the images specially to mark 1994, designated by the United Nations as the International Year of the Family.*

In the 1950's, tents like this one in Jalazone camp in the West Bank were "home" for many refugee families.

As new conflicts have created thousands of new refugees in many parts of the world, the pain of separation from home - rooted more than 40 years in the past - continues for over 2.9 million registered Palestine refugees living in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic as well as in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Henryk Sokalski, UN Co-ordinator for the Year told the UN General Assembly in October 1993, "we have heard a clear message that families are in need and that a sustainable future cannot be secured without them." UN agencies and over 120 countries are observing the Year.

1968. Three generations of the Mohammed family. They fled their home in the Gaza Strip during the 1967 war. Like thousands of others, they ended up in Marka camp, east of Amman in Jordan.

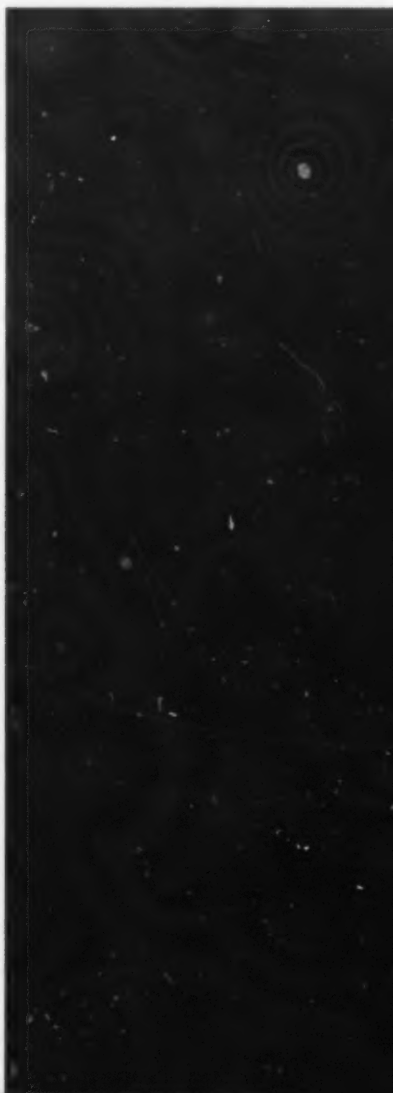
Fatmeh Khalifeh, mother of three, lost her home in Nabatieh camp in Lebanon in 1976. She and her family fled to Sh'hein near Beirut and are squatting in the bottom floor of this deserted house. One of her sons disappeared without trace in 1983. Her neighbours, living upstairs, were also displaced from Nabatieh.

The Mourshid family are able to make a living growing vegetables in Mashouk, near Tyre in Lebanon thanks to a grant from UNRWA.

Abu Castro and his family fly the Palestinian flag above the remains of their house which was destroyed by Israeli security forces in 1988. A previous house was demolished in 1971. The family now lives in a tent in Kharas village, south of Jerusalem.

Barbed wire still cuts through Rafah - splitting Palestinian families - along the border agreed between Israel and Egypt in 1982. Mohammed Ateya Abdul Aziz Issa and his wife and children shout from Gaza to greet some of their 45 family members stranded in a refugee camp on the Egyptian side of the fence. Under a plan already in progress, families are slowly moving back to the Gaza side of Rafah.

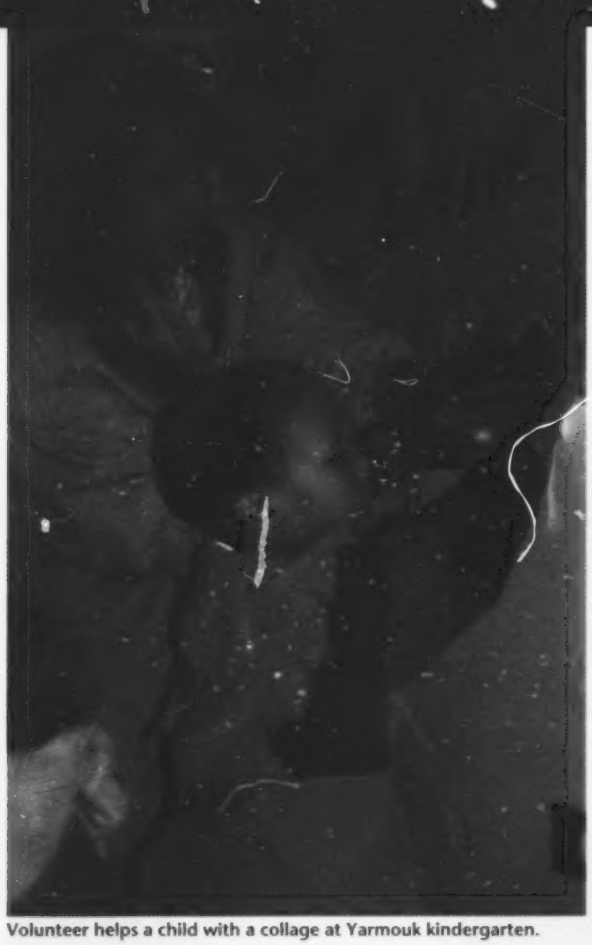
Rafah, Gaza Strip. The family of Yousef El-Hams. Like 40 per cent of the Gaza labour force, Yousef is unemployed.



Festivities at the wedding of Ayoub Mohsin in Beit Lahia in the Gaza Strip. Ayoub's bride, whose family is originally from Gaza, was living in Kuwait before her marriage. Although she is Palestinian, she has not been given residency in the Gaza Strip and can only stay on a tourist visa.

Livestock farmer Mustafa Ahmed El-Aktash, a refugee, is now head of an extended family of 26, living in Jordan. He and his family still practise their traditional vocation of tending sheep.

Fara'a camp, West Bank. The family of Abu Mohammed Abu Qamar runs the only bakery in the camp.



Volunteer helps a child with a collage at Yarmouk kindergarten.

# Giving mothers a new start

*Kindergartens run by volunteers from the Palestinian community have sprung up in association with UNRWA women's programme centres in the Syrian Arab Republic. They have given women with families an opportunity to explore new horizons.*

Syrian Arab Republic

The volume of laughter and chatter generated by a score of three and four-year-olds at the kindergarten in Jaramana camp, on the outskirts of Damascus, is testimony to the success of a day-care centre scheme initiated by Palestinian women and fostered by UNRWA in the Syrian Arab Republic.

At the Jaramana centre, the project of the day is a farmyard scene. Four young women volunteers from the Palestinian refugee community supervise the cutting out and gluing of paper goats, donkeys, chickens and rabbits. Furniture is simple and budget-conscious: a few low plastic tables and chairs. Teaching aids are also uncomplicated. The children are captivated by the colours and shapes. They trace out curling Arabic letters to write *himar* (donkey) and *djej* (chicken). From time to time a mother appears from the UNRWA women's programme centre next door to see her son or daughter and drink a coffee with the volunteers.

## JARAMANA, THE FIRST OF ITS KIND

Jaramana was the first kindergarten to be set up by the community in co-operation with UNRWA in Syria. The idea came from trainees at the women's programme centre. As the Agency expanded its training programmes for women, the need for day-care for children of women attending courses also increased. In many cases the traditional care network provided by the extended family had been fragmented as smaller family units moved away often in search of work. Added to that, difficult economic circumstances meant that both parents had to work to support their families.

Keen to encourage the initiative, UNRWA provided and renovated a disused supplementary feeding centre next to the newly-built women's programme centre in Jaramana camp. The women set up a committee to recruit volunteers from the camp and to administer the centre. Mothers training at the centre were given first priority for places for their children and were asked to pay a modest school fee. The committee then offered spare places to working mothers based on economic need.

## SUPPORT FROM OTHERS

Julie Reinholt, wife of the then UNRWA Field Relief and Social Services Officer in Syria, Jon Reinholt, volunteered to support the initiative by sharing her years of experience as a pre-school teacher to provide guidance and training. With fellow-teacher Lisa Keen, she set about raising money and conducted training workshops for the volunteer teachers.

The two teachers rallied the expatriate community in Damascus to lend their support. Shell Oil and the American and Canadian women's groups in Damascus donated money and equipment. Families leaving Syria donated old toys which were either used in the kindergarten or sold at charity bazaars with the profits used to buy Arabic readers. Julie raised money for furniture by selling home-made greetings cards.

The training workshops emphasized the importance of pre-school education as the foundation for further education. Volunteers were shown how to establish a daily routine in a kindergarten, given ideas for indoor and outdoor activities and taught basic educational psychology.

"The kingdom under the sea" by children from Yarmouk kindergarten.

## POSITIVE REACTIONS

The volunteers were enthusiastic about their training. Dallal Abdul Razaq said that she had "learnt how to improve and recycle everyday items - do all kinds of arts and crafts very cheaply".

Mothers were also grateful. Sa'ada 'Abdullah of Yarmouk told *Palestine Refugees Today* that "without this kindergarten it would be impossible to join this centre. Now I can attend the courses on a regular basis without being worried about my child". UNRWA teacher Naifeh Saleh from Yarmouk camp said, "I feel I do my job more effectively and with more enthusiasm, now that I know my child is safe and in such a welcoming environment. I would like to work there myself!"

The kindergarten at Jaramana.

### EXPANDING THE EXPERIMENT

**The Jaramana experiment, combining community initiative with Agency support, proved so successful that UNRWA constructed, equipped and furnished kindergartens in Yarmouk, Khan Eshieh and Khan Danoun camps next to women's programme centres. The child care offered by the volunteers has not only brought delight to the faces of their small charges but has given many mothers the chance to develop new skills and supplement family income.**

Ahmed Akela, 17 months, from Gaza, had surgery for a cleft lip. His mother was very happy with the work of the US doctors. "I hope other families whose children have the same problem will be given the same chance," she said.

# Bringing smiles back to Gaza

*Guided by humanitarian rather than political purposes, 24 volunteer specialist medical professionals working with a US non-governmental organization, Operation Smile International, travelled to Gaza to give children new hope.*

On June 7 1993, a team of American doctors and nurses boarded a plane in New York on a journey to Gaza where, under the auspices of Operation Smile International, they would perform life-changing surgery on 140 Palestinian children with severe deformities.

They were carrying out a two-week mission for Bill and Kathy Magee, founders of Operation Smile. The Magees first considered the idea back in 1991 when they were approached by Jim and Linda Ryan, who - through the Ryan Family Foundation - had set up 14 charitable projects in Jerusalem and had seen the needs of the Palestinian children. "I knew that Operation Smile could give the Palestinians a sign of hope," said Jim Ryan. "I wanted them to know that when people work together in the spirit of love, they can change the world."

**UNRWA SUPPORT**

**UNRWA helped the Operation Smile medical team by facilitating the importation of sophisticated medical equipment from the United States to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This equipment was afterwards left at Augusta Victoria Hospital. Both the Al-Ahli and Augusta Victoria hospitals are subsidized by UNRWA. Agency staff also assisted in screening patients suitable for surgery.**

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Dr. Andrew Woods, an anaesthetist on the team, described the apprehension and anxiety they experienced as they started out on their journey. "My first impression of Gaza began at Kennedy Airport. Once my destination and purpose of my trip was known, the security investigation was prolonged and intense. The atmosphere of distrust and suspicion was unexpected and uncomfortable.

"When we arrived in Gaza I couldn't help but notice the uncollected garbage accumulated in the streets. I was told that, since the *intifadah*, there had been a breakdown of basic civil order, and that there was no functioning local government. There was a bleakness

**RETURNING TO GAZA...**

**Operation Smile plans to return to Al Ahli Hospital in June 1994 to treat more children. An Operation Smile medical training team will also conduct the first in a series of symposiums to provide the medical professionals of the West Bank and Gaza with the necessary surgical and rehabilitative skills now lacking in their health care systems. Because of the large number of burns victims in the Palestinian community, burn prevention, treatment and care will receive considerable attention in the seminars.**

Dr. Andrew Woods and Dr. William (Bill Magee) of Operation Smile with patient.

to the urban landscape, a sense of desolation."

### CARING FAMILIES

"My first interaction with Palestinian children and their parents occurred in a medical clinic as we were screening several hundred children in order to identify those with surgical problems we could safely treat," said Dr Wood. "I was struck by two facts. The children were all in good nutritional status, except those with such severe cleft palates that they were unable to nurse effectively. As a whole, the nutritional status of these children was better than a comparable group of American children, who would be less well nourished because they eat too much animal fat and sugar and not enough fruits, grains, and vegetables. The health of the children in terms of nutrition spoke deeply to me about family cohesivenes and caring, and gave me an immediate respect for the Palestinian people.

"The second thing I noticed in the clinic was that the children were more fearful than children I had seen in American clinics. I could not tell if this was simply a cultural phenomenon or if it reflected the current political climate."

### LATE NIGHTS

The 24-member volunteer team operated at Al- Ahli hospital in Gaza. With the cooperation of Suhaila Tarazi, head administrator at the hospital, the team performed over 200 procedures on 140 patients during a five-day surgical week.

"We worked late into the evenings and often left the Al-Ahli hospital long after the nine o'clock curfew," said Dr Woods.

### A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

"My visit to the Palestinian refugee camps served by UNRWA was important for what I learned about the Palestinian people," said Dr. Woods. "I saw children who were well-clothed, well-nourished and clean and I had a feeling that the family structure here was still intact."

"My heart was touched by the plight of the Palestinian people and I felt the sadness that comes with seeing close-up the impact of historical conflicts on a specific child, on a family whose members I now know by name. Now, back in the comfort of my own country, I look around at the violence in America and realize that the Palestinians have something that many Americans desperately need - a loving family and a sense of community."

### SMILES IN THE WEST BANK

In 1992, Operation Smile carried out a similar mission to the West Bank, operating on over 150 patients at Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem. Rev. David Johnson, Jerusalem Representative of the Lutheran World Federation, which runs the UNRWA-subsidized hospital, said in a letter to UNRWA: "There were indeed smiles on the faces of the patients and their families throughout that week. In addition, the spirit and morale of the hospital staff was universally high."

**See what I can do now! Samer Hanna Shehda, aged nine, of Gaza Town was so badly burned on his arms that he could neither stretch nor bend them - until after the operation.**

**OPERATION SMILE**

**Operation Smile International (OSI) is a private, nonprofit organization based in the USA which mobilizes teams of volunteer medical professionals to provide reconstructive surgery for children with facial deformities such as cleft lip or palate, tumours and contractures caused by burns. Funding comes from private contributions made by individuals, companies and institutions.**

# A refugee's story

18 April 1968 - Abu Fathi at the Allenby Bridge.

Late 1993 - Abu Fathi with two grandchildren in Jordan.

*Looking through UNRWA's photo archives, we came across a 1968 picture of a refugee crossing the Allenby Bridge into Jordan. Curious to discover what had become of the man in the photograph we sent it to all ten camps in Jordan and located Abu Fathi. His story could be told by any of thousands of Palestine refugees uprooted time and again in the Middle East over the past forty-five years.*

Sha'ban Ali Hassan El-Nadi (Abu Fathi) lives in one of the modest shelters on the rim of Baqa'a camp. He is one of the few refugees from Gaza living there. To reach the reception room in Abu Fathi's house, a visitor has to avoid laundry lines laden with clothes of different colours and sizes for his grandchildren. Inside the room, a guest can see photos of Abu Fathi's family members, a map of Palestine and some embroidery which seems to hang haphazardly just to cover the bare walls dilapidated by the years.

The years have also lined Abu Fathi's face - so much so that he could not recognize himself in an archive photo taken of him by an UNRWA photographer while he was crossing the Allenby Bridge in 1968. Even his wife, Um Fathi, did not realize at first that it was his photo. When she did, she sighed and said "How time has gone!". Her children and grandchildren exploded in laughter and exchanged winks behind their parents' backs. Abu Fathi believes it is not only the years that have left their mark, but also difficult living conditions, displacement and dispersion.

**BAQA'A CAMP**

**Baqa'a camp. 20 kilometres north of Amman, is the largest of six refugee camps established in Jordan in 1968 to shelter the Palestine refugees who were displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a result of the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967. UNRWA provides the more than 78,000 people living in the camp with education, health and social services through 20 installations operated by over 500 Agency staff.**

### REFUGEE IN GAZA

Born in 1936 in Beit Daras, in the province of Gaza, Abu Fathi took refuge after the 1948 war with his parents and six brothers elsewhere in the Gaza Strip, settling in Jabalia camp. Twelve-year-old Abu Fathi worked as a pedlar to help his father

before taking up better-paid work in farming.

In 1953, Abu Fathi married Jabalia neighbour Jamileh (Um Fathi). She gave birth to five children, three boys and two girls in Jabalia camp, and to another five, three boys and two girls in Jordan camps. The family now has 39 members, including all the grandchildren.

Late 1993 - Abu Fathi with his family in Jordan.

### 1967: WAR INTERVENES

After the Arab-Israeli war in June 1967 and the occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, Abu Fathi and his family left Jabalia camp to Jordan across the Allenby Bridge on 18 April 1968.

Abu Fathi recalls: "We left the Gaza Strip in a truck heading towards the bridge, carrying with us our personal effects, four mattresses, eight blankets and some kitchen utensils - all that we were able to carry - leaving what remained in Jabalia camp, as we hoped to return a few months later. The Israeli checkpoint was already closed by the time we had reached the bridge. So we went to Aqabat Jabr Camp in Jericho where we stayed in a deserted shelter for three days with mosquitoes eating us up.

"From the Allenby Bridge to Jerash camp in Jordan, we travelled in a truck. Throughout the journey, the driver, Abu Mohammad, a kind man, kept telling us about himself and the conditions in the town."

They stayed in Jerash camp, ('Gaza camp') in an UNRWA tent - but not for long. In the following years, the family moved no fewer than seven times in search of work - twice to Ramtha, on the Jordanian-Syrian border where they worked on farms, twice returning to Jerash camp where they attempted to open a bakery, once to Sama al-Roasan in Irbid to work on the land and one final time back to Jerash camp before settling in Baqa'a camp, the largest camp in Jordan, nearer to the capital Amman. The children found casual work and Abu Fathi worked on nearby farms. The family still struggled to put food on the table.

### MISSED CHANCES

The hardship and the many moves meant that only Abu Fathi's youngest two children completed their basic education at UNRWA schools. Ahmad went on to graduate from a community college and Mahmoud took a course as a radio and television technician. The daughters married and the sons now work as daily labourers in farming, construction and other sectors. Mahmoud works as a radio and television technician.

### HEALTH PROBLEMS

Abu Fathi can no longer work. Severely affected by diabetes, for which he receives treatment at the UNRWA health centre in Baqa'a camp, he spends most of his time between the health centre and the market.

Abu Fathi says "since the end of the Gulf war, I have not been able to earn anything because of my illness. May God bless my children who are supporting me to overcome the difficulties of life. Fathi pays the rent of our shelter. Mousa, Issa and Ahmad provide us with food and clothing and Mahmoud shares the burden whenever he can."

### DISPLACED PALESTINIANS

**Abu Fathi and his family were among hundreds of thousands of Palestinians - some registered refugees and some not - who fled to Jordan at the time of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. They joined the refugees who arrived after the first Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948 and their descendants.**

**The people who fled to Jordan in 1967 included about 150,000 registered refugees from the West Bank and Gaza. Another 240,000 people were also displaced east of the River Jordan for the first time.**

**More recently, in the aftermath of the 1991 Persian Gulf crisis, Jordan had to cope with more than 300,000 Palestinians who left Kuwait - many of them refugees registered with UNRWA. Today, more than one million Palestine refugees live in Jordan, 23 per cent of them in ten refugee camps.**

A study in precision - a Siblin trainee practises welding.

# A stepping stone to success

*Siblin Training Centre is a symbol of UNRWA's recognition of the importance of vocational training in assisting the large Palestine refugee youth population in Lebanon to find suitable employment. This article takes a closer look at the centre, its trainees and graduates.*

On a hillside campus north-east of Saida in southern Lebanon overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, more than 600 young Palestine refugees are working to qualify for a better future. They are the lucky ones - chosen out of almost 2,000 who applied for places at UNRWA's Siblin Training Centre (STC). Yet, even for them, there is no guarantee of a job.

For years, the centre has been recognized as first class - the only one of its kind for Palestine refugees in Lebanon - and employers have been keen to take on many of the centre's 14,000 graduates. But recession and changing political tides in the region have severely eroded job prospects for Palestinians in the Middle East. Work permits for Palestine refugees are hard to obtain in Lebanon and employers usually give priority for scarce jobs to Lebanese citizens.

## CHANGES IN THE JOB MARKET

The staff at Siblin continuously monitor changes in the job market so that Palestine refugees get a chance to train in areas where they are most likely to find work. The centre's success has been remarkable. Despite an estimated unemployment ratio of at least 60 per cent for the Palestinian labour force in Lebanon, a survey of the status of STC's 118 graduates in 1991 alone showed that over 95 per cent had found employment.

There are signs that the job market could be changing for the better says Taher Taher, Siblin's Placement and Career Guidance Assistant. "Recently, Yemen and Oman announced vacancies in specific technical and trade specializations, and did not take exception to Palestinian graduates. As many as 190 have been taken this year," he says. Taher attributes this development to STC's introduction of "timely and needed technical trades, such as industrial electronics".

### A GRADUATE'S STORY

**Twenty-two-year-old Leila Ismail typifies the triumphs and disappointments of STC graduates. She specialised in Business and Office Practice and graduated with honours. After a frustrating job search, she found work over a year ago with UNRWA in Lebanon.**

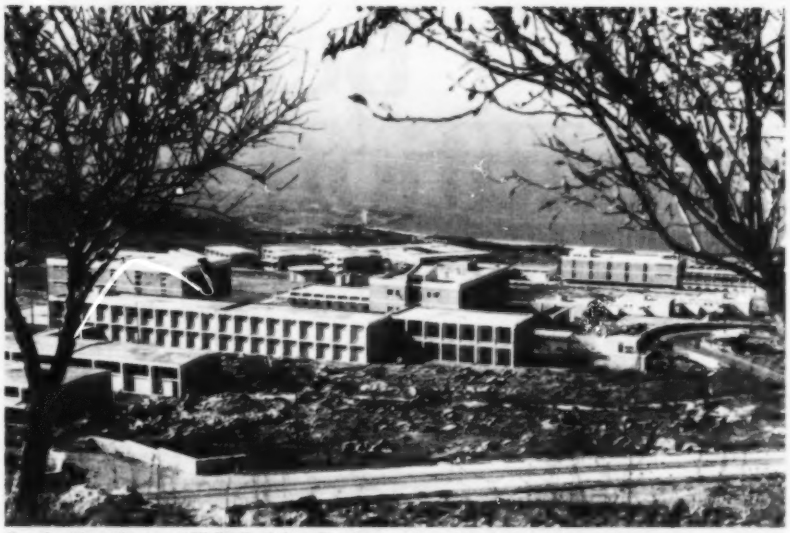
**"Sadly, many of my classmates are still jobless or else not working in their fields because most employers ask for college graduates - even though STC's curricula and standards are excellent," she said.**

**Leila uses a computer in her job - an area covered in her Siblin course - and sees it as "a stepping-stone". She has completed two years toward a degree in Informatics at the Lebanese University. She uses part of her income to support her brothers and sisters as well as finance her education."**

**As well as learning business and office practice or hairdressing, Palestine refugee women who attend Siblin also train to become public health inspectors, architectural draughtspersons, construction technicians, lab technicians and industrial electronics specialists.**

## SETBACKS AND SUCCESSES

Between 1983 and September 1987, Siblin was effectively closed down because of civil strife. Today the centre is limited by economic and legal constraints on working in Lebanon. "STC's performance and results are very good", says Taher. "The problem is the local labour market. Although there are some 15,000 companies in Lebanon, depressed wages, priority for Lebanese nationals and the difficulties Palestinians face in acquiring work permits prompted many to seek work outside. For a long time after the Gulf war, however, very few graduates were able to work in countries in the Gulf and many had to leave".

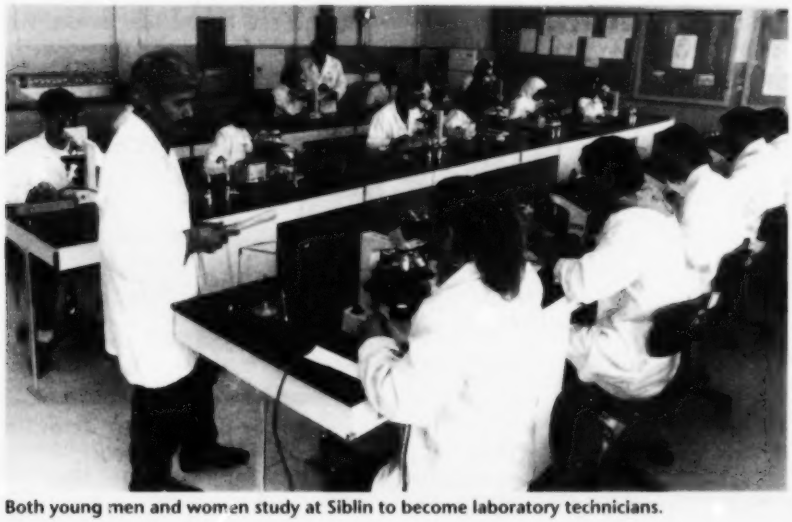


Overlooking the sea - Siblin Training Centre.

In earlier years it was a very different story. UNRWA's Chief of the Education Programme in Lebanon, Afaf Makieh, is also an STC graduate. She says that most graduates in this field have gone on to productive careers, whether in UNRWA or in educational and cultural institutions in the region or abroad. "For the great majority of us, who could not afford higher education," she adds, "STC became the stepping stone to secure a useful profession. We then used the income we earned to finance our own college or higher education in the same field."

Ibrahim Rahhal, Administrative Officer in Education for UNRWA in Lebanon, himself a former Principal of STC, confirmed that the centre has long been recognized as first-rate in the country. "For many years," he says, "local and foreign companies and institutions would send officials to recruit STC students for employment even before they graduated".

Credit for these successes goes to UNRWA's vocational training centre being more than simply a place for learning essential trades. Siblin also encourages self-reliance and initiative. As Rahhal says, "STC has not only made a substantial contribution to the welfare of Palestinian individuals and their families, but has also been able to upgrade the community's competence in a variety of fields and professions."



Both young men and women study at Siblin to become laboratory technicians.

### SIBLIN TRAINING CENTRE

**UNRWA's Siblin Training Centre (STC) is one of eight vocational centres in the Agency's area of operations (three in the West Bank, two in Jordan, and one each in Gaza, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic). It is located near the historical coastal town of Saida, nearly 40 kilometres south-east of Beirut. STC was originally two centres: The Vocational Training Centre donated by the Canadian Government (1962) and the Technical and Teacher Training Institute donated by the Swedish Government (1963). They were merged in 1969, although teacher training was discontinued in 1983.**

**About 70 qualified specialists teach courses in six trades and specialities: business and office practice, paramedical, building trades, electrical work, mechanical work, hairdressing and beauty culture. Instruction is in English. In addition to offering its own courses, Siblin also sponsors training for 37 specializations at private institutions.**

# Between caution and hope

*Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are caught between caution and hope in the wake of the PLO/Israel accord. An UNRWA video story broadcast by Cable News Network and other TV stations gives an overview of life in the West Bank and the Agency's efforts to make improvements.*

UNRWA Reporter: *The streets and shops in Jerusalem's old city are slowly returning to normal these days - but*

*always under the watchful eyes of Israeli soldiers. Palestinians here are caught between caution and hope.*

Palestinian man: "Whether Palestinians support or oppose the peace agreement, they are all committed to a national obligation: rebuilding."

Palestinian man: "The peace process will enable everyone to live

a decent life. It will also help them to improve their social and economic conditions."

*Dheisheh refugee camp just outside Bethlehem. One of 19 camps in the West Bank served by UNRWA - the UN agency which has worked with Palestine refugees since 1950. Life is still very basic. Over 3000 camp shelters in the West Bank need major repairs or complete reconstruction.*

*UNRWA schools are overcrowded. Many run on double shifts and a number need to be renovated or*

*rebuilt. Despite recent improvements in several clinics, other UNRWA clinics are cramped, dank and run down. And the lack of proper sewage systems in the camps poses a serious health risk. In the wake of the PLO-Israel agreement, UNRWA Commissioner-General Ilter Türkmen visited the West Bank to see how UNRWA can contribute to improve the living conditions and create jobs for refugees here. Following his meeting with PLO Chairman Arafat in Tunis, Mr. Türkmen had a working session with the Palestinian leadership in Jerusalem to discuss the role UNRWA can play during the transition.*

*An enlarged health clinic inside the old city of Jerusalem and a water filtration plant near Jericho are only two examples of how UNRWA is making a rapid impact on the ground.*

Sari Nusseibeh, Coordinator, Palestinian Technical Committees: "For as long as there is a problem of refugees and the refugees exist

inside the occupied territories as well as outside - there is a very important role for UNRWA to play."

*UNRWA has identified over $40 million in projects in the West Bank to tackle the most serious problems in the next few months. Quick results are crucial.*

Young woman: "We'll have to wait and see the results before we make any judgements."

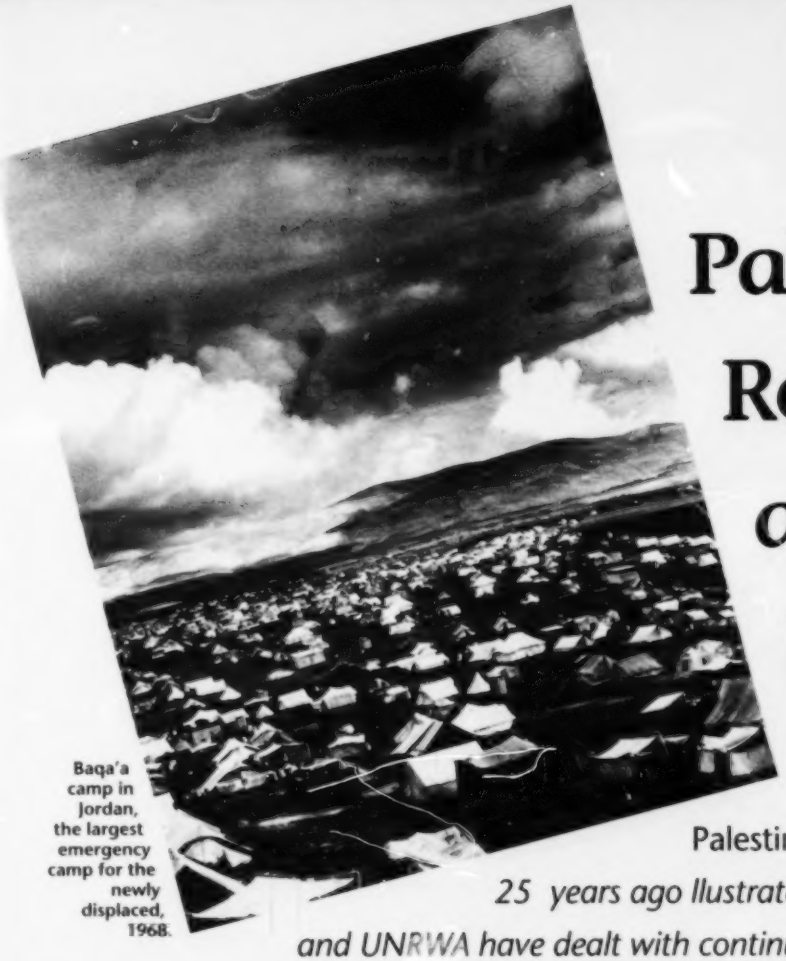
*Time may appear to move slowly in these refugee camps, but Palestinians*

*know this is no time to delay in delivering the benefits of peace.*

West Bank

# Palestine Refugees and UNRWA

25 years ago



Baqa'a camp in Jordan, the largest emergency camp for the newly displaced, 1968.

*Extracts from issues of* Palestine Refugees Today *published 25 years ago illustrate how both Palestine refugees and UNRWA have dealt with continuing challenges over the years.*

## DEALING WITH MAJOR PROBLEMS

"Two major problems facing UNRWA during the course of the summer of 1968 were inter-related. The first was financial. The agency faced the prospect of a significant budgetary deficit in 1969. The second problem was how, in the light of this precarious financial situation, UNRWA could provide some satisfactory form of solid shelter for the 80,000 newly homeless Arabs living under canvas in east Jordan emergency camps before the worst of the winter was upon them.

"It was decided, in co-ordination with the Jordan Government, that a moveable shelter programme should be inaugurated in the five tented camps north of Amman. All told, 140 truckloads of materials had to be dispatched from Beirut through Syria to Amman so that components arrived on site at the right time. The same arrangements on a larger scale are now being made for a further 3,000 shelters for Baqa'a Camp." (PRT No. 58 Dec/Jan/Feb 1968-69)

### IN BRIEF...

"Despite the dislocation of the refugees, the demand for education has remained high. In the school year 1967-68, provision had to be made for some 20,000 children in east Jordan who had come from the West Bank or Gaza." (PRT No. 58)

"Through ice and snow on Lebanese mountain roads, UNRWA trucks hauled building materials to the east Jordan emergency camps, where previously they had rushed in tents. Each month they must travel more than a million miles to supply clinics, feeding centres, schools etc." (PRT No. 60 May-July 1969)

## THE PERSONAL DIMENSION

Khalil Abdallah Salman was among Palestinians displaced by renewed military action along the Jordan Valley in February 1968. "With his family, Khalil travelled north to a new UNRWA emergency camp at Nu'eimeh. Here ten thousand people lived on the dusty, windy plain - their shelter: simple 'picnic' tents, designed for holiday camping and rushed in from overseas in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 hostilities to provide some protection for refugees. Khalil and his family had one small, blue picnic tent, faded now and patched at the edges, while the window 'zips' had long since broken." (PRT No. 57, Sept-Nov 1968)

Families meet in Nur Shams camp, West Bank.

# PALESTINE REFUGEES *today*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